

Gizbow

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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In 1984 when the first Gremlins movie hatched into theatres the Amiga was still several years away from finding its feet as a mainstream gaming platform. Thus there were no licensed games for the system until the unexpected sequel landed in 1990, Joe Dante having been coaxed into reprising his role as director by an ample budget and free reign to run amok with the plot. It would never have come to fruition otherwise interviews reveal.

Against the odds - and for the first time ever - Spanish developers Topo Soft won a contract with Warner Brothers to produce the accompanying game, making history in the process. A side-scrolling platformer sharing the full name of the movie - 'Gremlins 2: The New Batch' - was the result.

Independent versions were released for the Amiga, Atari ST, Commodore 64, DOS, MSX, Amstrad CPC and the ZX Spectrum. These were published by Erbe Software in Spain and Elite elsewhere.





Topo Soft's contract, although sometimes reported as being exclusive, *wasn't*. We know this because Hi-Tech Expressions also secured the rights to release an entirely different Gremlins 2 title for the DOS platform. Similarly, Sunsoft joined the soiree, releasing licensed games for the Nintendo Entertainment System and Game Boy. Taking all the licensed Gremlins spin-offs into consideration across various platforms there are nine in total. Pre-16-bit days these amounted to an interactive fiction title, a Robotron clone and a top-down action game centred around returning mogwai to their cages.



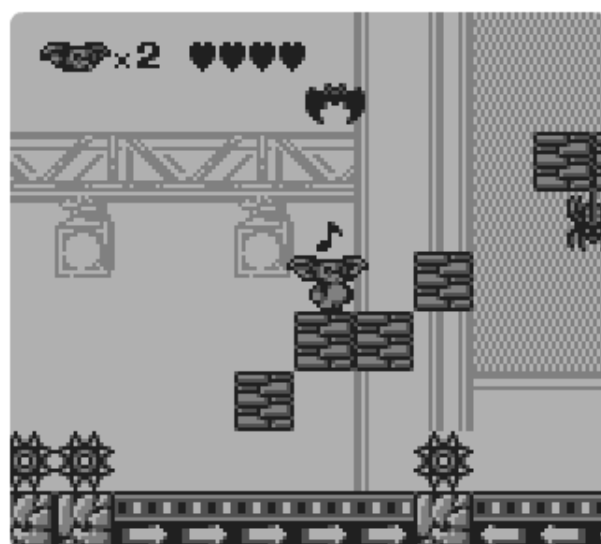
GREMLINS™ 2

THE NEW BATCH

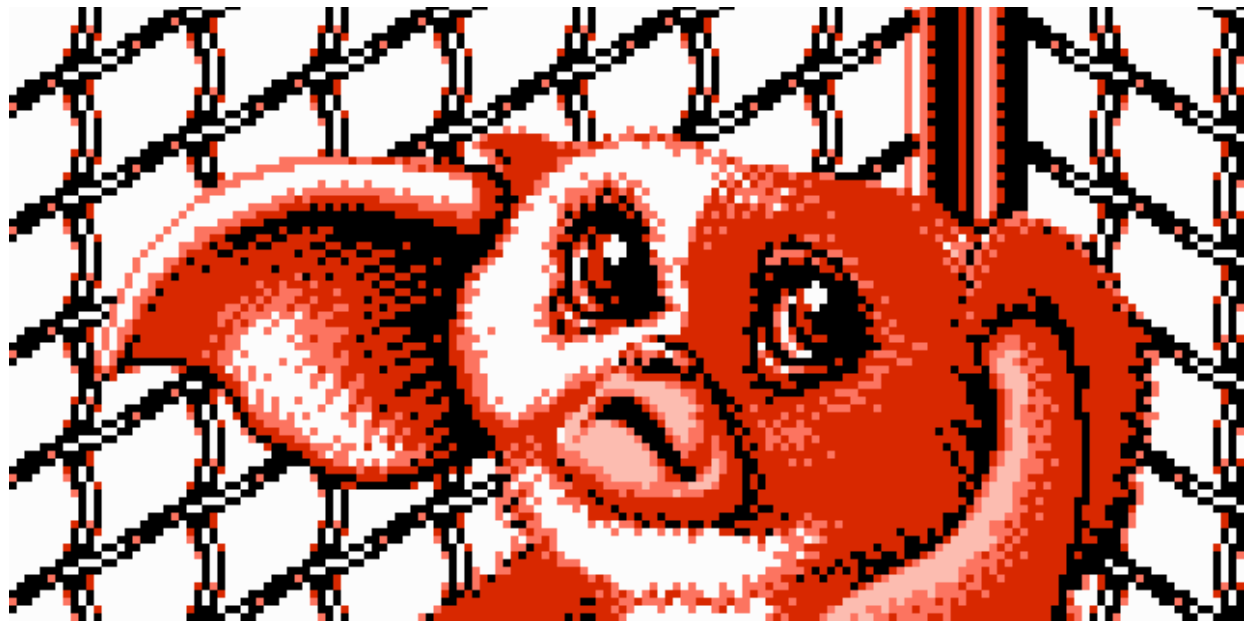


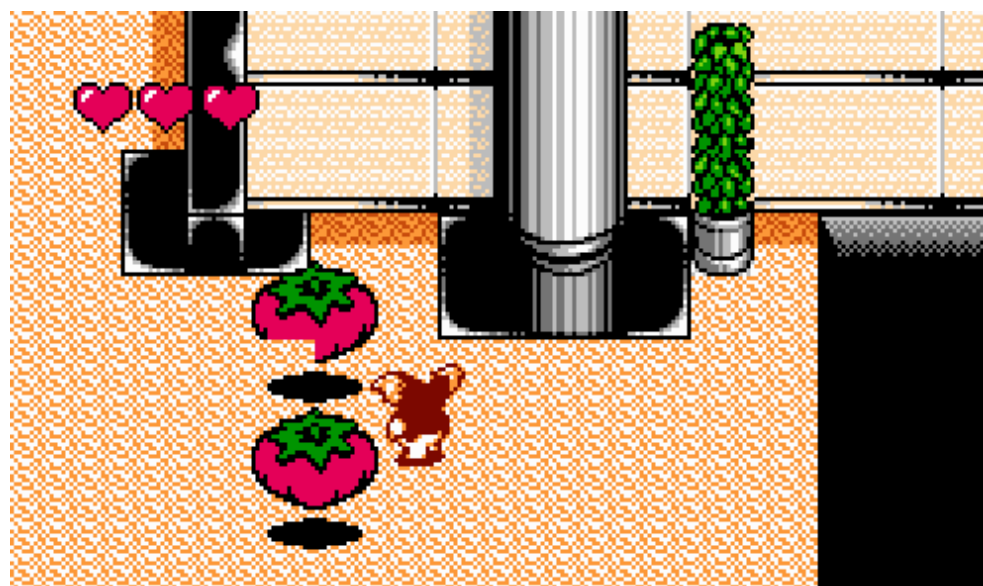
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With the exception of Hi-Tech's DOS game, all the Gremlins II titles hit the retailer's shelves in 1990 to coincide with the movie's release date. I'd say while the movie was 'hot property', only it didn't do nearly as well at the box office as you might expect, earning just \$41.5m from a budget of \$50m. This is in complete contrast to the original, which from a stake of \$11m managed to rake in \$153.1m.



Many of us believe the sequel performed better at the time because it's considered a cult favourite today, albeit one that still draws drastically divided opinions.

Gremlins is a disturbing, child's-mind-warping masterpiece of a horror movie, whilst the sequel is largely a slapstick affair that makes you wonder why the first film gave rise to so many nightmares. A fun movie in its own right certainly, just not really a *Gremlins* movie; an all-time classic that blends sweet Yuletide sentiment with gruesome trepidation like no other. In one scene *literally*, in a food blender no less.

Likewise, Topo Soft's interpretation received mixed appraisals; the double-takingly positive ones were enough to elevate the title to number six in the sales charts in December 1990, and 10th place in February the following year (source: C&VG magazine). Or maybe it was a case of

recognisable name syndrome mixed with the need to find suitable Christmas presents for the kids.

In contrast, today's assessments almost entirely lean towards the extremely negative end of the spectrum now that the glitzy movie sheen bias has worn off, and nothing short of an iPhone is an acceptable gift for your little cherubs.

"Both graphics and sound fit the bill nicely, with well-animated characters and loads of sampled sound, but the gameplay suffers from being over-difficult in parts, making things somewhat frustrating. There are some very nice touches, such as Gizmo parachuting in Rambo-style when the correct token is collected, and the Gremlins disappearing with a satisfying 'squelch' when blasted. Overall, a fun game that will please platform fans, but definitely not one for novices."

82% - Computer and Video Games (December 1990)



"Then sanity prevails and the disk goes out of the window instead - this game is so-o-o-o frustrating. On the

plus side there are some excellent sound effects, the speech when Billy dies, and the chuckles of the Gremlins, all of which appear to be sampled. There even seems to be a bit of Star Trek in there as the lift doors slide open, and the torch fires. The characters themselves are all superbly detailed but it all seems to pale as the joystick flies across the room in frustration. Admittedly, platform games do need an element of difficulty to make them addictive but this really has gone too far."

74% - Raze (January 1991)



"Without these playability problems, Gremlins 2 could have been a really good game. Unfortunately, it's... well... pretty evil."

40% - ACE (December 1990)

"The original movie had to be one of the weirdest mainstream films of the Eighties, and made a pretty neat computer game from Adventuresoft (80%, Issue 2). The belated sequel had a weak plot, but spectacular FX with zillions of oddball Gremlins and ways to kill them - who

can forget the 'Gremlin in the shredder' scene or Rambo Gizmo? Now as the film hits the video stores, Elite finally unleash a conversion packed with the vicious little monsters."

40% - Zzap! (May 1991)

Nevertheless, one plus point to its credit is that it follows the premise of the movie very closely, being perfect fodder for game adaptation. With the origin story already established, The New Batch jolts us very swiftly into the action and doesn't slow down until the threat has been neutralised.



So too in the game - playing as Billy Peltzer - it's your objective to exterminate every last gremlin, employing exactly the same methods as your on-screen counterpart played by Zach Galligan. Well all except for pre-gremlin, Gizmo, because he's cute and adorable and if we lost him to the same fate it would be like killing off Bambi. There would be riots in the streets! Plus it would diminish the opportunity for a second sequel. A long overdue miracle that may still happen according to Hollywood news reports. All we really know about it is that it will be a true sequel rather than a

reboot, because they're just stupid, cynical cash-grabs aimed squarely at the kids who weren't even born when the original films first aired.

In *The New Batch* we catch up with Gizmo sequestered away back at Mr Wing's dilapidated down-town store in New York, the idea being that in his safe hands another catastrophic outbreak would be prevented. Ha! Fat chance! This isn't *Gizmo's Christmas Vacation*. It's not even set at Christmas this time - it was released in June; another reason it fell short of the first movie.



Our sickly purveyor of fine oriental apparel (and decades of antique dust) is currently being harassed by billionaire tycoon, Daniel Clamp.



Clamp - an amalgam of Ted Turner and Donald Trump - is desperate for him to sell his emporium to make way for the next step in his empire-building scheme. Mr Wing is adamant he's staying put, but fate has another agenda - as he coughed a bit while Clamp's goons relayed his kind offer, naturally he was on borrowed time.



Six weeks later he's dead and buried and the bulldozers move in, forcing evictee Gizmo to flee for his life. Perhaps looking ill wasn't much of a stretch for Chinese-American actor Keye Luke as he died from a stroke less than a year after Gremlins 2 was unveiled. Unfortunately, Gizmo only gets as far as the next alleyway before being captured by Clamp's twin genetic scientists who intend to conduct experiments on the fuzzy hero to see how he ticks.

Martin: It's just like I always say; if you want to find something weird you have to go downtown.



Their speciality is cloning, and they're real-life twins. Geddit? OK, so admittedly it works better in context. The duo can also be seen together in Terminator 2 where one brother plays a T-1000 clone of himself.

Gizmo is taken to Clamp's tower plaza unbeknownst to Billy and fiancée Kate who now work for Clamp in the same building. Sparked by a chance occurrence of the Gizmo-signature-tune-humming variety, Billy is reunited with his old pal having managed to inveigle his way into the Splice o' Life lab to rescue him.



Leaving the accident-prone mogwai in his desk drawer for safekeeping, Billy asks Kate to go and collect him while he attempts to wriggle out of an impromptu meeting with his boss. Marla Bloodstone played by Haviland Morris went onto become the voice of Michelle Payne in the 2001 Max Payne game, and now works in real estate. Just a small morsel for the trivia fans to chew over... don't eat it after midnight mind you.



Who wants to play 'spot the King Kong homage' with me?

Obviously, before long Gizmo is unintentionally doused with water, by a faucet repairman played by John Astin this time. John also played Gomez in The Addams Family between 1964 and 1966, hence the reason Gizmo refers to him as the head of the kooky spooky clan. Where were we? Oh yes, following John's incompetent plumbing the wheels are once more set in motion for a bout of gremlin-oriented terrorism.

Brain Gremlin: (on telephone) Well, it's rather brutal here. Right now we are advising all our clients to put everything they've got into canned food and shotguns.



Gizmo spawns a number of interesting new mogwais - similarly cute on the surface, albeit mischievous and sadistic beneath, so when Kate arrives to take him home she grabs the wrong one. While Daffy is bug-eyed and hyperactive she assumes the crazy New York pace of life must have sent Gizmo loopy, and doesn't give it a second thought.



Billy spots the difference straight away, racing round to the Clamp complex to assess the damage and establish how

they're going to reverse it before it's too late. His initial blueprint (quite apt as he's now working as a graphic designer rather than a bank clerk) - to set the clocks forward by three hours, thereby tricking the gremlins into venturing outside into the blinding deadly daylight - has to be abandoned when the weather turns bleakly overcast.

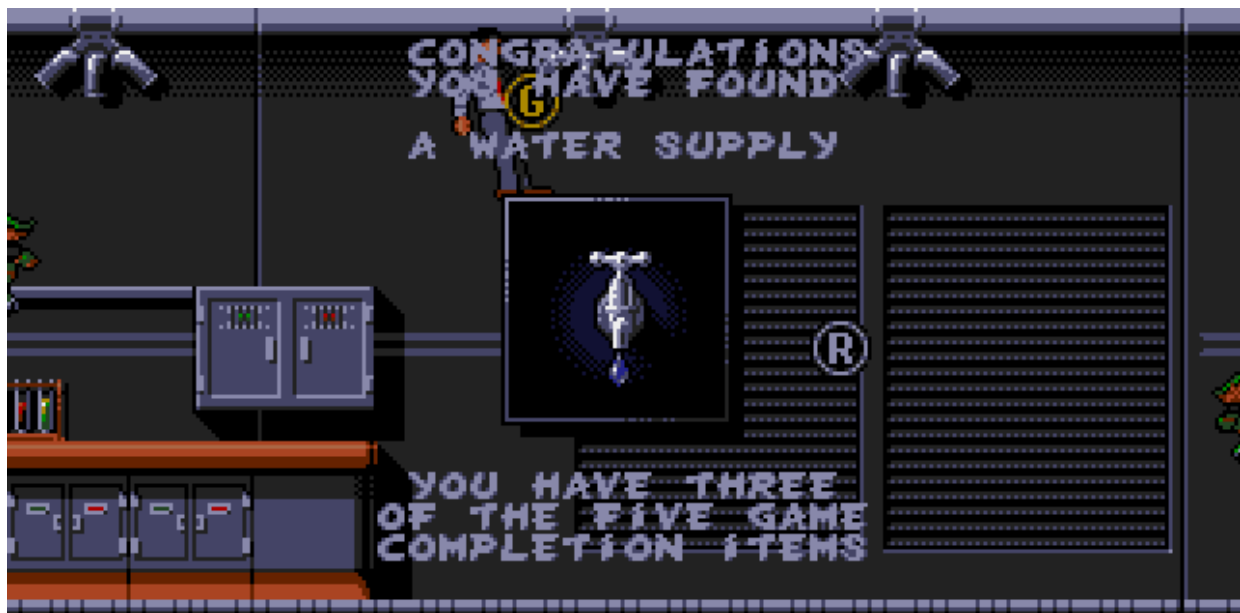


Plan B is - ironically - to soak them with water from a hose, and then project the electro-gremlin trapped in Clamp's video conferencing phone into the rampaging throng to fry them to a gooey mulch rather like the fate that befell the Wicked Witch of the West in The Wizard of Oz.



Gremlin: I'm melting. I'm melting. What a world, what a world...

To replicate the hair-brained scheme in the game you must find five objects before nightfall, and do nothing much with them really; everything that occurs in pixel land is merely implied, relying instead on gamer's knowledge of the movie to fill in the blanks. There's not even an introduction to explain what's going on, or who you are. Lucky then that the manual covers the plot and game mechanics very thoroughly and isn't written in translated pidgin English as you might expect from a foreign port. Elite took care of this so that explains that one.



First we must locate Gizmo's box in order to stow him away while the water cannon drowns the warty critters beneath the balcony. In the movie this is just a cardboard box which you wouldn't imagine would be waterproof, whereas the game ups the ante by offering a mobile home more like the one Billy's Christmas present arrived in at the beginning of the first movie.



Mogwai discoverer, Randall Peltzer, who played Billy's dad didn't feature in the sequel and won't be in Gremlins 3 since he died of a heart attack in 1999. I don't suppose the singer-songwriter's cocaine addiction did him any favours in the longevity stakes. Hoyt Wayne Axton was due to make a cameo appearance in The New Batch, introducing Gizmo to his latest invention; a waterproof wetsuit! Nevertheless, the producers decided against it in the end believing the scene to be unnecessary.

Next up we must find a clock set to the wrong time, clearly a reference to the time-meddling ploy that wasn't, for technical reasons, as already explained.

Capturing the electric gremlin is our third priority. In the movie Billy spots him preparing to launch out of a power socket, and somehow manages to intercept by holding up a telephone handset. Electro-gremlin is thereby sucked up as if the phone were a Ghostbusters' Proton box, and held prisoner by putting him on hold. In a more straight-laced horror movie you might question the logic of this, except Gremlins 2 satirises its own predecessor like a cynical critic with a grudge to settle, so anything goes. You can't mock a film that already beat you to it; it immediately becomes invulnerable to nerdy nit-picking. Leonard Maltin being invited to make a cameo appearance to reprise his criticisms of the first movie before being savaged by a mob of slathering gremlins should give us a hint that none of it is to be taken too seriously.



"Hi. I'm Leonard Maltin, and this is The Movie Police. First, our video watch. Just re-released on video is Gremlins, though I can't imagine why. I know some people found it fun, but I'd rather have root canal work done.

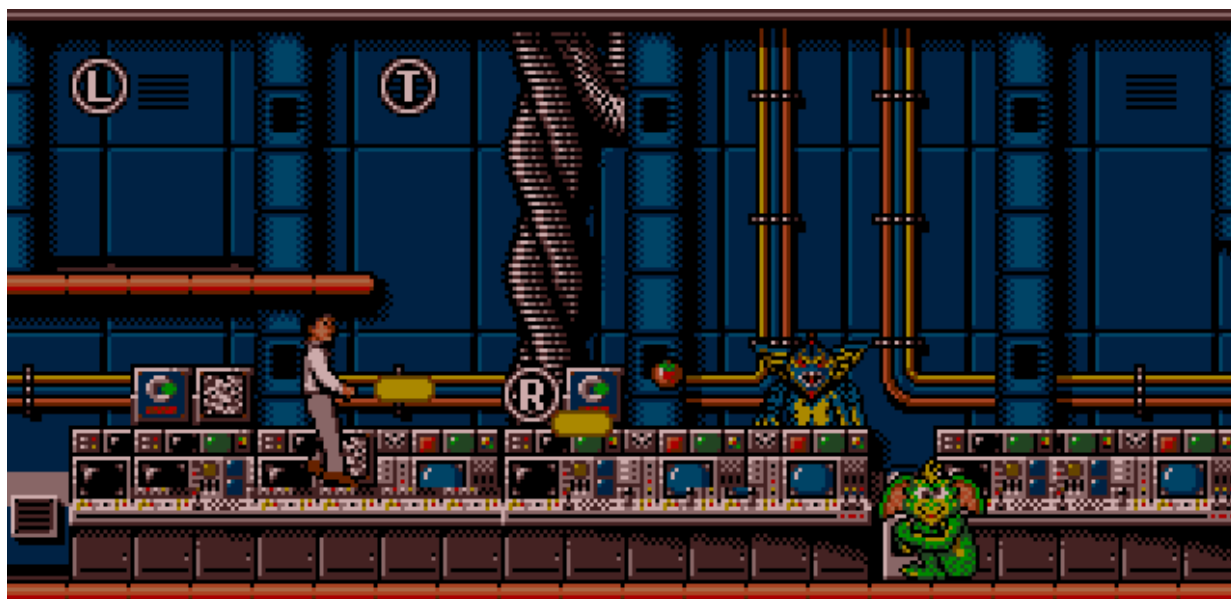
What's fun about a movie full of ugly, mean-spirited monsters who attack innocent people? Are we so desperate for entertainment that this trash passes for fun?

Ow! I was just kidding! Ah, it's a ten! It's a ten!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

On the silver screen, initially, the plan is to switch off the water supply to prevent any further multiplication so here too that's a sub-task. It's not made clear if that's because you need to attach a hose to it (objective number five) or because you intend to disable it.



All these items are tracked down through exploring various scenes from the movie split across five levels. First up there's the systems control room George and Lenny hijack to watch the 1953 movie The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms on one of the security monitors.



Then there's the Splice o' Life genetics lab run by Christopher Lee, stocked with serums the gremlins steal to supercharge their abilities (enter Brain Gremlin stage left), or

create abominable hybrids like Bat Gremlin and the centauroid Spider Gremlin.

A deleted scene reveals that the real monkeys kept in the lab were so terrified of the gremlin puppets that they wouldn't leave their cages when their trainers gave the signal. This made a sequence involving their liberation impossible. Hence the cut. When Billy does this the gremlins had yet to be unleashed.



Cable Studios where Marge records her microwave cooking show is the locale for another level, as is the horror movie set where Munsters parody Grandpa Fred shoots his House of Horrors graveyard shift show. Al Lewis, the actor who portrayed Grandpa Munster, hosted a similar show on TBS known as 'Super Scary Saturday' in the '80s.



Grandpa Fred: They put me on at 3 am. People who are awake at 3 am aren't afraid of the Wolfman. The only thing that frightens those people is sobering up and going to work.



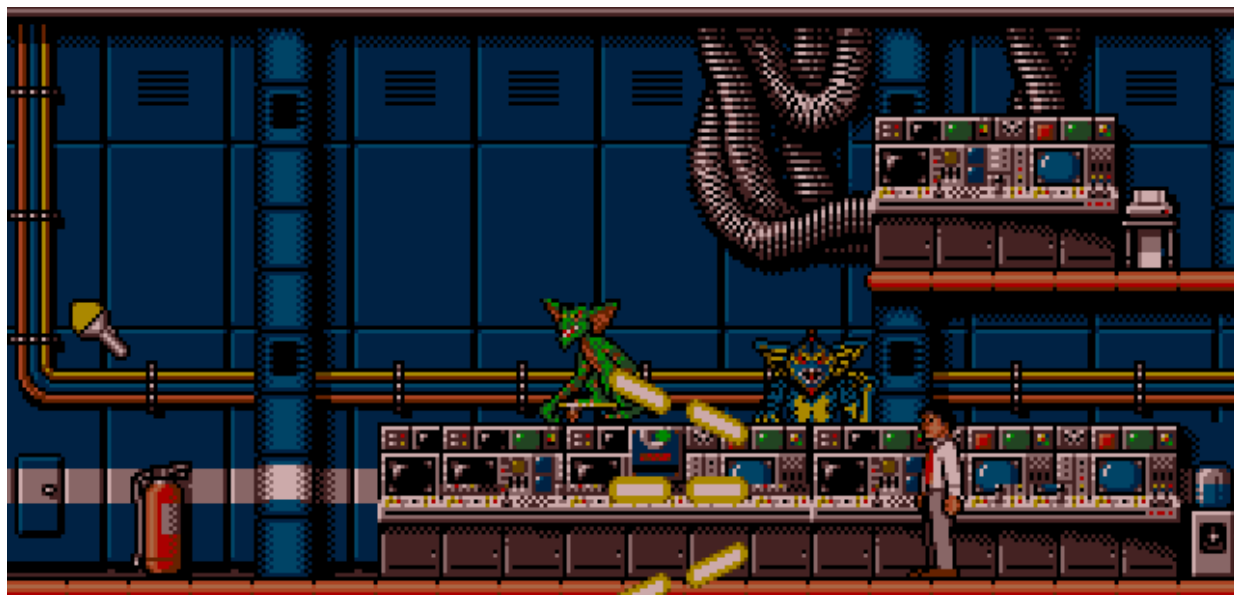
Finally, there's the Clamp offices section where Billy and his colleagues work (Kate is a tour guide so works in the public areas), followed by the lobby.



Whether horizontally or vertically, the screen shifts along in a flick rather than through continuous scrolling. Regrettably, the dilemma this introduces when combined with an eternally spawning barrage of enemies is that you can be killed just as you leave a screen or enter it by an unseen bounding critter with no time to react.

As with any game where the opposition won't stay dead, there's no point hanging around to admire the scenery. You're forever racing to reach the next area killing only as many gremlins as absolutely necessary, yet at the same time, you need to be especially careful to avoid running headlong into one of the erratic mutants. Panic and stress is the inevitable side effect... not exactly a recipe for a fun experience.

Initially, we're armed only with a single beam torch that shoots more like a laser gun, yet others can be collected from the environment. Also, by gathering up bubbles used as credit we can buy better weapons in between-level shops, accessed by accumulating at least ten bubbles.



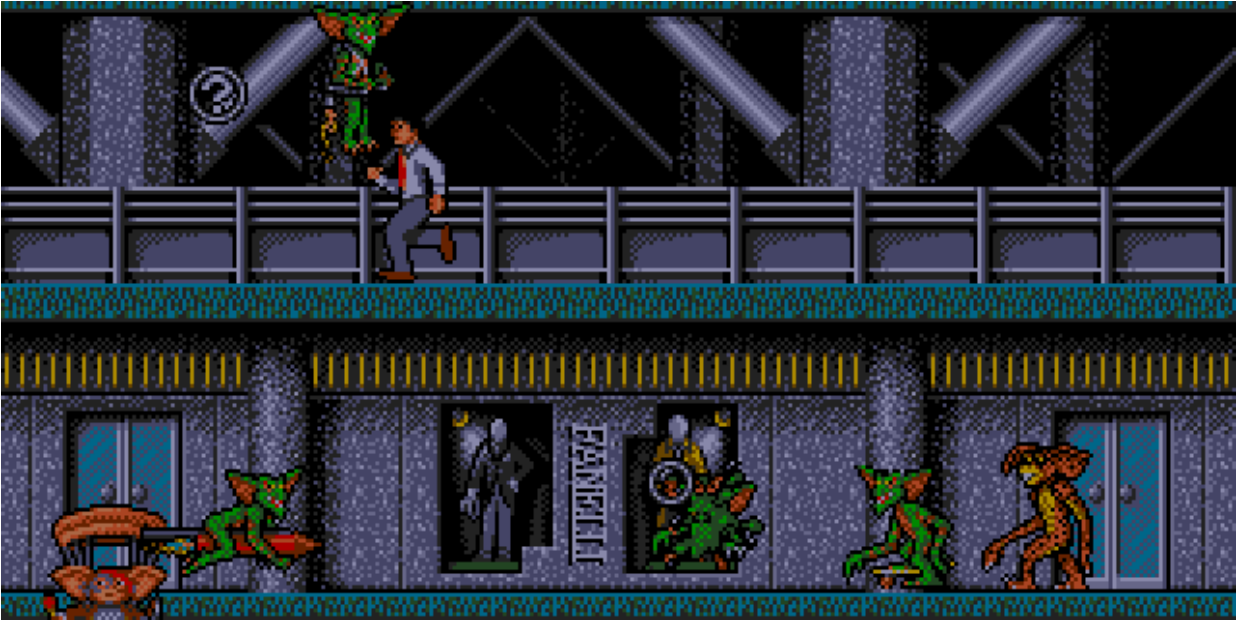
Those bought in the shop are retained after you die, and include boomerangs, enhanced flashlights, frisbees, tougher skinned tomatoes (for shipping purposes), which arc over opponents like the useless torch in *Ghouls and Ghosts*, and office phones.



All the distinct mogwais-turned-monsters from the movie are present and correct. Daffy (named after the duck) rolls into a ball attempting to bowl us over like a set of skittles, there are pogo-ing and skateboarding varieties, while Mohawk throws anything to hand at us.



Cigar smoking George (as seen on the movie's poster) flicks red hot ash at us. There are gremlins armed with guns, no doubt stolen from Clamp's security guards. 'Sexy' Gremlin aka Greta blows noxious kisses and Lenny hurls the genetically modified tomatoes devised by The Stanton Twin Brothers as Jetpack Gremlin and Rocket Gremlin torment us aerially. If Lenny and George put you in mind of John Steinbeck's novel 'Of Mice And Men', that was the idea. They're the protagonists.



Something else accurately duplicated from the movie, all the fixtures and fittings are super-sized as though we're wandering about the Honey I Shrunk the Kids set. Wait a minute, that's not right. You can't pull the wool over my eyes *that* easily. Since when was Billy a dwarf?

At least I suppose it makes our ability to jump on periodically opening and closing filing cabinet drawers to reach bonus items more meaningful. A technique inspired by Billy's hasty explanation for the suspicious activity emanating from his desk drawer when Clamp visits the premises. He swallows the ruse and moves on believing they open automatically every so often just in case you need to retrieve something.



To make our fight for survival slightly easier we can collect various floating letter power-ups. R turns Gizmo into Rambo mogwai who drifts down from above on a parachute armed with a bow and arrow. Not just random wackiness. This he learns from watching Rambo III from his cage in Mr Wing's shop, on the TV gifted by Clamp as a bribe to vacate the premises. Sorry, I mean gesture of goodwill. Mr Wing - 'Keye Luke' to Gizmo, the actor's real name - doesn't approve of mindless TV so unsurprisingly this fails to grease the wheels, so to speak.



Kate Peltzer: What happened to HIM?

Billy Peltzer: I dunno. I guess they pushed him too far.

P bubbles equal extra points, which are actually point/ess because they only count towards your high score tally.

L is for life (this has all turned a bit Sesame Street), an extra one adding to the generously essential seven you begin with. A bonus life is nice and all, but *infinite* lives are better. Typing in 'Sinatra' on the high score table activates the cheat mode. Why Sinatra you ask? Because in the movie the gremlins treat us to a chorus of New York, New York, one of Frank's signature songs.

Brain Gremlin: The city so nice they named it twice! See it one time, won't you?

T delivers extra time, although that's the least of your worries given you could meet your maker at any second thanks to the single hit death system. In any case, you're given seven minutes to complete the first level so it's not time you're short of. Where's the S for sanity restoration?

Should you survive long enough to run out of time you also lose a life, often respawning at the edge of the screen right on top of a power socket. As these are the key to electro-gremlin's kingdom the consequence is another "bye, bye Billy" speech sample, and the loss of *another* life.

Question mark bubbles offer a randomised power-up, all except for the Super Gizmo one.

Finally, G bubbles open the lift used to exit to the next level, this being set in a tower block.

If the maddening, unrelenting horde of gremlins doesn't first instigate a "bye bye Billy" death voice sample, it's possible to reach the finale in under fifteen minutes. This too is unspectacular; a single static screen depicting the aftermath of melted gremlins duplicated from the movie. Sadly we don't get to see the dramatic carnage of the gremlin's comeuppance that grants New York a reprieve from invasion, so once more we're left to rely on our imagination. In a standalone licenseless game it would all be highly confusing.

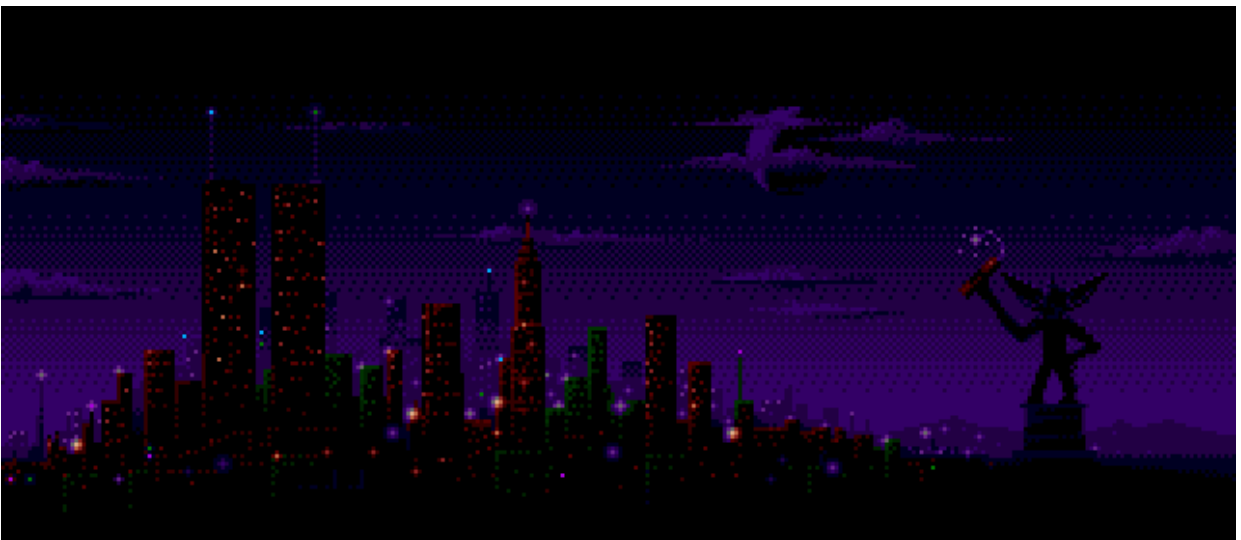
There's no mention of Tarty Gremlin surviving the massacre and inflicting herself on Forster, Clamp's right-hand man, in a grisly DIY marriage ceremony that his facial expressions indicate aren't entirely unreciprocated. Strange chap. Still, life would be boring if we only ever married humans.



'Saving Grace' is a phrase that might be over-egging the pudding somewhat. What I *will* say though is that the barely animated title screen incorporating speech sampled from the movie, along with an authentic rendition of Jerry Goldsmith's wonderful 'Gremlin Mayhem' track that plays throughout are impeccable. A few more tunes of equal calibre might have been nice.



Similarly, dying isn't nearly so bad when you get to see a beautifully drawn vista of New York decorated with a Gremlin statue, the allusion being that the city has been enslaved, presumably with Brain Gremlin at the helm.



In the movie, he was only seeking civilisation. At least that's what he *said*. Right, that's quite enough positivity for one

day. I don't want to get carried away.

Grandpa Fred: (interviewing Brain Gremlin) Creature, what is it that you want?

Brain Gremlin: Fred, what we want is, I think, what everyone wants, and what you and your viewers have: civilization.

Grandpa Fred: Yes, but what sort of civilization are you speaking of?

Brain Gremlin: The niceties, Fred. The fine points: diplomacy, compassion, standards, manners, tradition... that's what we're reaching toward. Oh, we may stumble along the way, but civilization, yes. The Geneva Convention, chamber music, Susan Sontag. Everything your society has worked so hard to accomplish over the centuries, that's what we aspire to; we want to be civilized.

(a Gremlin with a beanie cap acts goofy next to Brain)

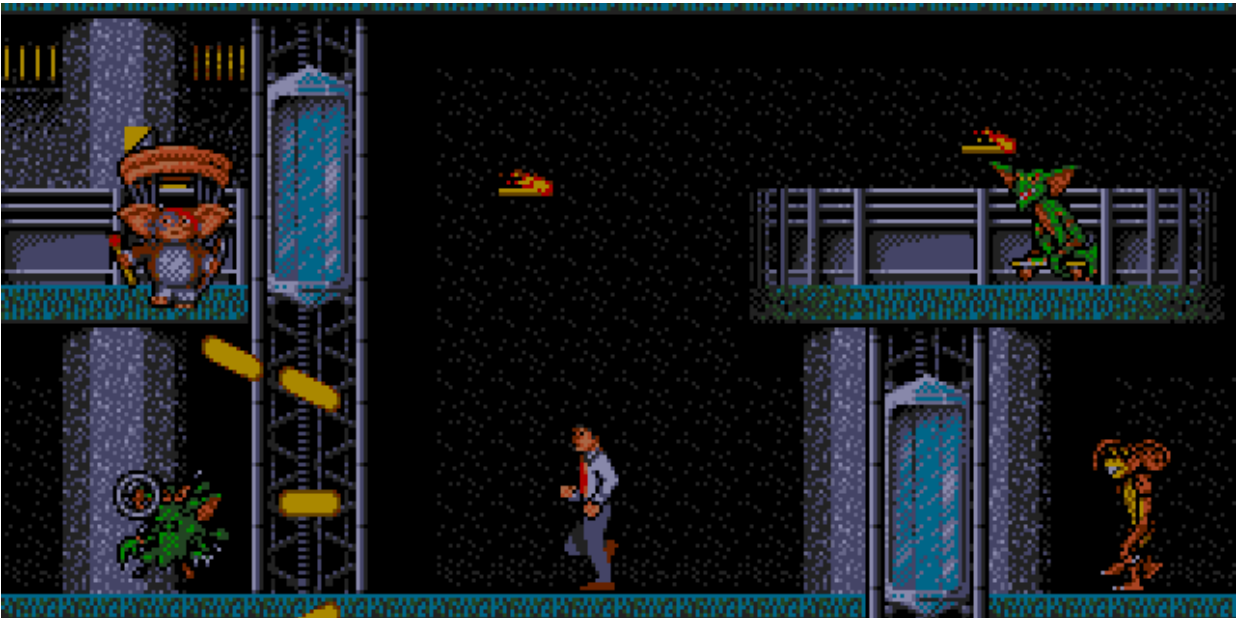
Brain Gremlin: You take a look at this fellow here.

(Brain shoots the Gremlin in the head. The Gremlins in the bar laugh. Grandpa Fred and Kujitsu leave)

Brain Gremlin: Now, was that civilized? No, clearly not. Fun, but in no sense civilized. Now, bear in mind, none of us has been in New York before. There are the Broadway shows - we'll have to find out how to get tickets. There's also a lot of street crime, but I believe we can watch that for free. We want the essentials. Dinettes. Complete bedroom groups. Convenient credit, even though we've been turned down in the past.



Overall, whilst evoking strong memories of the movie, Topo Soft forgot to inject the fun factor. So what The New Batch boils down to (in a gremlin-sized pan on Marge's hob) is a bland, uneventful and very brief platformer that mostly takes place on a single, ground floor plane, notwithstanding the occasional lift.



Perhaps it might not be so bad if the controls weren't so lethargically unresponsive. Then again if Billy actually did

what you wanted him to do, *when* you wanted him to do it, there would be no challenge at all.

Maybe the controls were deliberately botched because it would be cheaper than creating a decent, satisfying, license-worthy game with a genuine conclusion. You never know. When money's tight and you're pressed for time because the apocalypse is dawning on your doorstep it's not unusual for things to be published unfin...

(Turner Doomsday video kicks in)

"Because of the end of civilisation, the Everything Amiga Network now leaves the air. We hope you've enjoyed our programming, but more importantly, we hope you've enjoyed... life."

